

Early Childhood Care and Education: An Overview

Prepared for the Joint Committee on Education
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December 20, 2010

Introduction

Early childhood has increasingly become a larger part of policy discussions on educational attainment and the development of human capital. Because early childhood is a crucial time in a child's development, the dialogue continues on how to balance the all the various needs of the child: health, social, emotional, cognitive, and physical (Kagan & Reid, 2009). There is not universal agreement about how states should define or financially support early learning. It ranges from an emphasis on universal prekindergarten for four-year-olds to the availability and affordability of high-quality infant and toddler care.

Early learning is a complex, multidimensional topic which extends far beyond what can be captured in a single report. The focus of this report is twofold: 1) to provide an overview of funding and policy supports for early childhood in Missouri, and 2) to highlight many national and international efforts in early childhood education and care with particular attention to prekindergarten.

The State of Early Childhood

In the early childhood sector, a natural tension exists between emphasis on cognitive development and a broader approach to whole child development (Christina & Nicholson-Goodman, 2005). In part, conflict arises because the missions of specific initiatives differ (Halfon et al., 2004). For example, Head Start is a comprehensive program that focuses not only on the development and health of the child but serves the entire family.

Many prekindergarten programs concentrate on cognitive development and school readiness though the definitions of "universal" and "prekindergarten" are not standard within the early childhood profession (Christina & Nicholson-Goodman, 2005). From another perspective, early childhood support in the form of childcare subsidies has emphasized support of working parents and not necessarily the educational outcomes for the children. If the focus in early childhood shifts to prekindergarten programs delivered primarily through public schools, some are concerned about a decrease in the availability of infant and toddler care (Schumacher, Greenberg, & Lombardi, 2001).

Related to these challenges in early education is the fact that in most states different state agencies are responsible for various aspects of early childhood which can mean conflicting priorities, inconsistent data collection, and a lack of ownership of or responsibility for early childhood (Christina & Nicholson-Goodman, 2005; Schumacher et al., 2001). Furthermore, dependence on federal funding can make budgeting at the state level a challenging, uncertain process (Christina & Nicholson-Goodman, 2005). Income- and age-eligibility disparities and different regulatory and quality standards exist across different federal programs with Head Start

standards among the highest in terms of staffing qualifications and ratios and curriculum (Schumacher et al., 2001).

Where K-12 education is a largely uniform institution, early childhood programs vary substantially. With diverse delivery systems and blended funding sources, it becomes challenging to replicate specific successful early childhood initiatives on a large scale. Developing a program that can be taken to statewide scale is more challenging than developing a good program on a small scale (Christina & Nicholson-Goodman, 2005).

The first part of this report outlines the sources of funding for early childhood programs in Missouri. The second part of the report will provide a look at early childhood across the state, in other states, and in other countries.

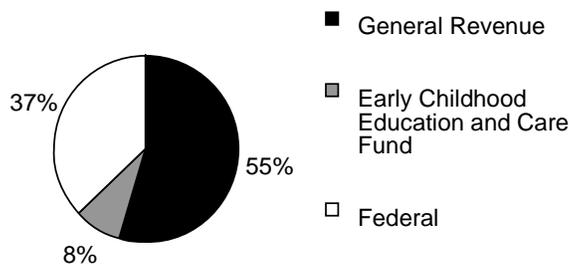
Missouri’s Early Childhood Support

State and Federal Funding

In most states, early childhood services are funded through several agencies, and Missouri is no exception. In recent years, many states have stressed funding through collaboration and coordination which early childhood professionals refer to “braided” or “blended” funding. By combining funding sources to fully fund programs, this strategy provides more complete and stable funding for early childhood programs while also serving to coordinate the various goals of early childhood.

In Missouri, FY11 funding for early childhood programs is \$263,765,376, and federal funding is \$156,044,576 for a total of \$419,809,952. The largest percentage of state or federal funding (55%) comes from state general revenue. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1. Early Childhood Funding Sources



State and federal funding of early childhood initiatives is distributed through three departments: the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the Department of Social Services (DSS), and the Department of Mental Health (DMH). (See Table 1.)

Table 1. Early Childhood Funding by Department¹

Department	Source	FY11 Funding
DESE		
Early Childhood Special Education	GR and Lottery	\$135,210,376
Parents as Teachers	GR	\$13,000,000
First Steps	GR	\$16,740,703
First Steps	Early Childhood Education and Care Fund	\$5,873,898
Missouri Preschool Project	Early Childhood Education and Care Fund	\$14,882,600
Even Start	Federal	\$1,456,675
Childcare Development Block Grants	Federal	\$348,415
First Steps	Federal	\$7,761,583
Title I.A Preschool ²	Federal	\$34,639,201
DSS		
Childcare Subsidies	GR	\$62,686,902
	Early Childhood Education and Care Fund	\$14,860,897
	Federal	\$111,402,702
DMH		
Ozark Center for Autism	GR	\$510,000
Comprehensive Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation	Federal	\$436,000

Funding of early childhood, particularly prekindergarten, raises questions beyond whether funding will be sufficient. Concerns include the potential for a detrimental effect to private providers if public schools are given state support to offered prekindergarten (Goldsmith & Rees, 2007). Additionally, moving older children from private providers to public prekindergarten programs has raised concern about increased cost of private care. Older children are less costly to serve because of staffing ratio requirements; therefore, older children average out the overall cost of care for families in childcare settings³ (Goldsmith & Rees, 2007).

¹ Data Sources: Senate Appropriations; Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

² Of the Title I.A funds distributed in schools in FY11, DESE reported that 15% was used for preschool. The \$34.6 million represents 15% of the total Title I.A funds.

³ A potential flaw in this argument is that most childcare providers charge different rates for different aged children, so that older children do not “average out” costs.

Missouri's Early Childhood State Policy Support

Coordinating Board for Early Childhood

The CBEC is established in Section 210.102 (2), RSMo. under the Children's Services Commission. The board is comprised of state department representatives, early childhood professionals, and other appointed members. The CBEC does not serve in a governance capacity, rather they function as an advisory group to coordinate the various services and programs for early childhood. The CBEC lists on its 2011 legislative agenda: maintaining current funding levels for Parents as Teachers with the intention to eventually restore to FY09 levels, ensuring funding for childcare assistance to support families at 127% of federal poverty guidelines, and working with DESE and the Coalition for School Readiness to develop a plan for a state system of voluntary prekindergarten.⁴

Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems⁵

ECCS is a federal grant awarded to the Department of Health and Human Services to develop community systems that will support the well-being of young children. While the focus of the grant is on child health, the work of regional organizations identified as the ECCS coordinators supports areas of child development beyond health. For example, the Mayor's Commission on Children in Springfield facilitates coordination among early childhood educators, families, and community organizations to support early childhood efforts. The commission sponsors feature articles in the local newspaper on school readiness expectations and strategies parents can use to help prepare their children for school. In south central Missouri, the Children Ready to Enter School Committee of the Community Resource Council serves as the ECCS coordinator. At regular meetings providers share information and offer professional development to other early childhood professionals, and family resource activity events serve as an opportunity to gather data from families.

Early Childhood Advisory Council

Missouri is one of six states to receive a portion of \$1.1 billion in federal grants from ARRA funds to support ECACs. Missouri's federal grant is \$888,524 with a state match of \$2,073,226 from various sources including DSS, DESE, and other public and private sources. The CBEC was named by Governor Nixon to serve as the ECAC for Missouri.⁶ The CBEC is charged with many of the same responsibilities identified by the ECAC grant.

A Look at Early Childhood Programs Around the State, Around the Country, and Around the World

Missouri

Several communities across Missouri coordinate efforts to support early childhood programs. Listed below are several examples.

⁴ Source: Coordinating Board for Early Childhood. http://dss.mo.gov/cbec/pdf/fy12_policy_agenda.pdf.

⁵ Source: Missouri Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) Stakeholder Team Profiles, 2010. University of Missouri-Kansas City Institute for Human Development.

⁶ Source: Dr. Angela Hull, former Executive Director, Coordinating Board for Early Childhood.

Belton School District has an enrollment of 4,739 students and serves approximately 400 children from infants to prekindergarteners. The Department of Social Services, Child Care Block Grants, Missouri Preschool Project, Title I, Early Childhood Special Education as well as local funds from the school district and United Way all contribute to Belton’s early childhood program (“Working together,” 2010).

Center School District has an enrollment of 2,291 students and serves approximately 200 students in early childhood programs. The program runs two half-day sessions five days per week. Funding sources include Head Start, Title I, Missouri Preschool Project, Early Childhood Special Education, and local district funds (“Working together,” 2010).

Independence School District has an Early Education Department which serves 3,475 children. The district supports an array of opportunities and services for families from home visits to developmental screenings to prekindergarten. Funding sources include Head Start, Early Head Start, Even Start, Title I, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Department of Social Services, and parent fees as well as local support from Kansas City Public Television and Hallmark (“Working together,” 2010).

Springfield School District serves 850 students through funding from Title I and Early Childhood Special Education. All participating families also receive Parents as Teachers home visits (“Working together,” 2010).

United Services Early Childhood Center serves more than 1,000 children with special needs from ages birth to five in six school districts in St. Charles County and Warren County. Services include prekindergarten as well as family support services. Funding from Early Childhood Special Education, First Steps, and United Way is supplemented by grants, fundraising, and donations (“Working together,” 2010).

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education also highlights the following communities in Missouri for demonstrating multifaceted support for early childhood programs: Calhoun School District, Central Missouri Community Action, Clinton School District, Community School District, Couch School District, Greenville School District, Hannibal School District, Maplewood-Richmond Heights School District, Seymour School District, and Sullivan School District (“Working together,” 2010).

Missouri By the Numbers	
	Estimated population ages 3-5 (2009) – 237,585*
	Children served in home-based programs (2010) – 14,880**
	Children enrolled in prekindergarten programs operated by the local school district (2010) – 25,532[†]
	Children served by Head Start (2009) – 19,060^{††}
	Children served by Early Head Start and Migrant Head Start (2009) – 2,744^{††}
<small>*Source: Missouri Census Data Center. Some five-year-olds included in this count are in kindergarten. **Source: Missouri OPEN Initiative. Numbers are based on organizations with a reported capacity, no closed date, a youngest reported child age of less than 60 months, an oldest child age greater than 36 months, and a facility type of "Family Home". [†]Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. ^{††}Source: Missouri Head Start State Collaboration Office</small>	

In addition, many communities have initiatives coordinated by the Early Childhood Comprehensive Services regional teams that address the full range of early childhood services in a community or region.

The Success by 6[®] Partnership of the United Way of Greater St. Joseph coordinates efforts between a number of community stakeholders to address children's health and overall development. Parents as Teachers, childcare providers, pediatricians, St. Joseph School District, Buchanan County Health Department, Heartland Health, St. Joseph Youth Alliance/Educare are among the many stakeholders in the partnership (Abel & Fuger, 2010).

The Children Ready to Enter School Committee of the Community Resource Council in Poplar Bluff serves as the ECCS regional team for south central Missouri. The CRESC hosts a number of seminars and events for parents and early childhood professionals on topics ranging from serving children with special healthcare needs to literacy (Abel & Fuger, 2010).

Additional ECCS regional teams operate in the Kansas City Metro Area; Marshall and Sedalia; Springfield Metro Area; West Plains; Southeast Missouri (Bootheel) Region; Jefferson County; St. Louis Metro Area; Boone County; Macon, Shelby, and Monroe Counties; Maryville; Joplin; Ozark Plateau/Lakes Region (Richland); and Cape Girardeau (Abel & Fuger, 2010).

United States

States vary in how they have chosen to develop and fund early childhood initiatives. As with local communities, several states have implemented public-private partnerships to support early learning while other states have looked to dedicated funding sources such as lottery revenue. What follows are examples of how states have addressed prekindergarten funding and programming as well as state-level governance of early childhood.

Funding

Oklahoma funds prekindergarten through the state foundation formula, but it is supplemented by other sources (e.g., Head Start) because state formula for prekindergarten does not cover the entire cost (Christina & Nicholson-Goodman, 2005). Oklahoma incorporated prekindergarten into their funding formula to provide more stable funding through difficult budget years. However, this approach does not guarantee that in financially stressed times districts will not redirect some funds to K-12 while relying more heavily on support from other community agencies and organizations to supplement state support for prekindergarten (Christina & Nicholson-Goodman, 2005).

In Georgia, lottery dollars fund prekindergarten for four-year-olds. Prekindergarten is offered in childcare settings, public schools, and Head Start classrooms with the goal of universal access for all four-year-olds (Schumacher et al., 2001).

Prekindergarten Programs

New Jersey's Abbott Preschool Program is often cited in discussions of early childhood because of its recognition of quality and findings from longitudinal data which indicate a lasting impact

of preschool. Abbott preschools were created by court order (*Abbott v. Burke*) that required what is now 31 school districts serving the poorest students to offer prekindergarten for three- and four-year-olds. New Jersey prekindergarten requirements under the Abbott decision meet nine of ten National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) quality benchmarks which include quality standards on teacher credentials and training, class size, teacher-child ratios, screening and referral services, meals, and site monitoring. Most (56%) of the 40,000 Abbott Preschool Program children are in private childcare settings, while 37% are in school district classrooms and 7% are in Head Start (Whitebook, Ryan, Kipnis, & Sakai, 2008). New Jersey uses a blend of state and federal funding to make the Abbott preschool programs available to serve children in full-day and full-year programs (Whitebook et al., 2008).

North Carolina offers More at Four, a prekindergarten program targeted toward disadvantaged students. North Carolina also directs resources toward professional development for early childhood educators (Stedron & Clothier, 2008).

New York and West Virginia have developed prekindergarten programs that require a set percentage of prekindergarten classrooms to come from community-based providers where there are community providers willing and eligible to participate in the state-funded programs. Alabama, Arizona, Wisconsin, and Georgia reference the inclusion of community providers in the state statute regarding prekindergarten programs but do not specify minimum required levels of participation (Schumacher, Ewen, Hart, & Lombardi, 2005).⁷

Most prekindergarten programs do not fund full-day, full-year programs. However, Ohio, Massachusetts, and Connecticut include the stipulation in the requirements of their state-funded prekindergarten program that a portion of the slots be available in full-day, full-year programs (Schumacher et al., 2005).

Governance

While several states have divisions for early learning within their department of education, Washington has the only state-level department exclusively for early childhood: the State Department of Early Learning. DEL coordinates all of the state's early childhood programs, services, and initiatives ("Washington Department of Early Learning," 2010).

International

Early childhood education and care is part of the education system in countries throughout the world. Quality is a chief concern as more nations look to find external validation of quality (*Starting Strong*, 2001). International challenges with early childhood do not differ substantively from that of the United States. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations participating in an early learning study noted the need to balance the diverse

⁷ Missouri is one of 23 states that allows state prekindergarten programs to be housed in any type of setting (public or private) as long as standards are met. (Source: National Association for the Education of Young Children, www.naeyc.org).

needs of communities and families with providing all students equitable access to quality care and education⁸ (*Starting Strong*, 2001).

Several European countries have moved their early childhood programs into their departments of education, but Kamerman (2005) noted a persistent concern that early childhood would evolve into the structure of K-12 education. Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden do not support a form of early childhood education that is patterned after primary school (*Starting Strong*, 2001).

In several of the OECD countries, early childhood education and care is an entitlement. In Belgium access to early childhood education and care is guaranteed for children beginning at 30 months old. In Italy access is guaranteed from age three, and in the Netherlands and United Kingdom from age four (*Starting Strong*, 2001). Australia and the Czech Republic do not guarantee a legal right to prekindergarten education, but most Australian states provide prekindergarten to four- and five-year-olds. In the Czech Republic, there is good access (though it may be fee based) to prekindergarten for families who want it.

Sweden and Denmark provide sufficient early childhood opportunities to meet demand, and their early education teachers have university degrees. In Denmark, 87% of municipalities have places for children ages one through five which includes fee-based programs. (*Starting Strong*, 2001).

In half of OECD countries, participation in early childhood education is at 80% or higher (“Education at a glance,” 2009). For all of the countries included in the OECD early childhood survey, their academic rankings are shown in order of average ranking in Table 2.

Table 2. OECD Countries’ Academic Rankings

	Reading	Math	Science
Finland	2nd	1st	1st
Netherlands	9th	3rd	6th
Australia	6th	9th	5th
Belgium	10th	8th	13th
Sweden	8th	15th	16th
United Kingdom	13th	19th	9th
Czech Republic	21st	11th	10th
Denmark	15th	10th	19th
Norway	20th	24th	25th
Portugal	24th	28th	29th
Italy	25th	29th	28th
United States	-- ⁹	27th	22nd

Source: www.geographic.org; taken from OECD in Figures 2009.

⁸ The countries participating were Australia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States.

⁹ The United States was not ranked overall against the other countries because there was not a reading ranking for the United States.

Conclusion

This report provides a glimpse into the intricacies of early childhood policy and funding. Access to early childhood care and education and the quality of those opportunities are common themes throughout discussions of early childhood whether it is at the local, state, national, or international level. Whether by design or default, support of early childhood initiatives involve numerous stakeholders who craft systems of delivery to meet the needs of their specific circumstances.

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